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Tok Area Public Information Center Community Meeting

The public is invited to a community meeting regarding development of a new visitor information center in the Tok area, to replace the current Alaska Public Lands Information Center (APLIC). The meeting will be held Monday, January 14, 5:30 p.m. at the Log Community Building.

A consultant team, led by Charles Bettisworth and Company of Fairbanks, will provide information and seek public comment on:

- **“Programming” for the center** – What types of services and information should the center provide, and how much interior and exterior space is needed for these services?
- **Location** – In what general area should the facility be located? Where are potential sites? What criteria should be used to select the site?

More information regarding the meeting and work completed by the consultant team is included in a Project Update handout, available at the APLIC, the Library, or on the web at www.dced.state.ak.us/econdev/

The principal focus of the new center will be to provide information about public lands to visitors and local residents alike; this information will highlight the natural and the cultural history of the land throughout Alaska, with special focus on the borderlands area. The center will provide visitor services for highway travelers and other visitors and will serve as a springboard to nearby visitor attractions. It will serve as a visitor information center for the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The facility offers the potential for community uses, such as school groups and outdoor education, and may provide opportunities for cultural interpretive facilities in the region.

The facility will be operated by the State of Alaska, Department of Community and Economic Development, and the construction will be funded primarily by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Federal Highway Administration.

Facility Programming

The consulting team using information provided by the participating agencies, has developed a preliminary draft assessment of space requirements for the visitors facility. In addition to the visitors facility, consideration has been given to locating the Headquarters facilities for the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge (US Fish and Wildlife Service), and perhaps local offices of the Bureau of Land Management. This would require additional federal funding above and beyond the APLIC funding.

The purpose of a program document is to identify required activities, estimate the area required for each activity, and to describe the functional relationships between each activity. The program document will also be used to determine site requirements, including area, location, utilities requirements, and other desired attributes. Preliminary project construction budgets can also be developed from this program information.

With respect to the new visitor center, the basic building area would be approximately 11,000 square feet. If a larger theater/assembly space for community use is included, another 1,000 square feet would be required for a total area of 12,000 square feet. Parking, access, and open space requirements indicate that approximately 2 acres would be required for this facility.

If the USFWS and BLM offices and headquarters facilities are co-located, this would add another 21,000 square feet of building area, with maximum land area requirement of just over 7 acres.

These estimates are approximate and need to be fully verified by the participating agencies over the next several months.

Location

The consultant team has considered five general areas in and near Tok where the new visitor center could be located. The team used site evaluation criteria to compare these areas, and identified examples of potential sites in each area.

Selection of the “best” location for the facility will depend upon which criteria are the highest priorities. For example, a location in the center of Tok may be preferred if the most important criteria is convenience for visitors who are walking or making a “short stop” in Tok – while a more natural site outside of town may be preferred if the most important criteria is offering outdoor programs on-site that interpret the natural environment.

As a next step, the cooperating agencies will prioritize the site evaluation criteria and make a decision on which general area would be preferred for the facility. Candidate sites in that area would then be more closely evaluated and preferred site(s) identified. Public comment on the site evaluation criteria will help the agencies with this decision.

Next Steps to Develop the Facility

The January 14 public meeting is the third community meeting on the project. Public comment has helped the consultant team and agencies in considering what components need to be included in the facility, how these components need to be organized, and what are the potential locations for the visitor center.

In February, the consultant team will prepare a project report that will recommend a general area for locating the center, give examples of potential sites in this area, show conceptual diagram of the building and site, and discuss project budgets.

The cooperating agencies will use this report continue their work to develop the facility, including conducting more detailed site investigations, selecting a site, and designing the facility.

For more information regarding the project or the January 14 public meeting, contact Charles Bettisworth in Fairbanks at (907)456-8790 or Odin Brudie, Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development in Juneau at (907)465-5466.